

We now turn to the passage of Scripture which we always read on Christmas Eve and that is Luke's version of the birth of Jesus. We always read Luke's version because only Matthew and Luke record any information about the birth of Jesus. Matthew's version, however, is very short compared to Luke and lacks any real details about the birth.

No census, no inn, no manger, and no shepherds in Matthew's version. Matthew does provide Wise Men or Magi arriving later. It is Luke's version that we focus on because of the details.

But some of the details that Luke uses don't add up. We will read in this scene mention of Caesar Augustus, Quirinius, and of a census. However, historians have difficulty with finding a time when these 2 figures and a census line up accurately. Another example in the Bible where the writers are not focused on being historically accurate like we demand in our culture today.

Luke combines these various features for something more important than historical accuracy. Luke appears to combine these historical elements because of what they represent.

Take, for example, the decree from Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus was seen as a ruler who brought peace. Could it be that Caesar Augustus makes an appearance in this story for Luke to interpret this birth as a sign of real peace?

Returning to one's own hometown for a census is not recorded in Roman history during this time period. Could it be that Luke uses this requirement as an explanation for placing the birth in the hometown of the Old Testament's King David and fulfilling biblical prophecy?

Today, in our interpretation of the story, we have also placed historical details in this story which are simply not there. The birth most likely occurred in the summer rather than the winter. And sorry, having innkeepers is cute when the children act out the pageant, but nowhere will you find in the text any mention of an innkeeper.

Therefore, as we read this passage of Scripture, don't look for historical accuracy. Instead, read this as Luke's theological interpretation of an event that changed the world. An event where the Son of God is born into a time and place, brings real peace and salvation, and overthrows the powerful.

Read Luke 2:1-20

Today on Christmas Eve we gather in worship and celebrate the good news of great joy that a Savior has been born. But for many of us we know that this is not a season of great joy. For some of us, or for some of our close friends and family members, this is not a time of great joy.

We know that Christmas can be a time of great sadness for some. The Christmas holidays can be a sad time for anyone mourning the death of a loved one. The Christmas holidays can be a time of anxiety for many who cannot afford to purchase the presents for their children that they really wanted to.

The Christmas holidays can be a time of anxiety for anyone who is facing some changes in the coming year and they are unsure of what lies ahead. The Christmas holidays can be difficult for people who are facing regrets for actions taken or not taken in the previous year.

The Christmas holidays can be a time of stress when you have travel plans to visit family that you really don't get along with all that well. For many of us or for many people in our lives these are difficult days.

You may be aware that this past Thursday was the shortest day of the year in terms of light. The winter solstice. For the days leading up to Thursday the light was getting less and less and less. On Thursday of this week the days of declining light hit their peak.

So that means that Friday, Saturday, today, tomorrow and for the next several months the light will appear just a little bit longer. The longest day of light doesn't suddenly appear. The longer days gradually appear each day over the next several months until they peak in the summer.

The slow increase of light may be the good news that we can take away from today's story. Mary and Joseph gather in some sort of cave or dwelling place. They have been unable to find a suitable place to stay for the night. Except for the animals around them, no one is present when the baby is born. It's a slow dawning of light into a dark world.

But then we read about some shepherds appearing. Shepherds were considered lower class by many. Not the types of people that we would choose to be the first ones to see the new baby. But we are told that they have been guided to that place by an angelic presence. The light of the new birth begins to shine a little brighter through them.

Next in the story Mary and Joseph take the child to Jerusalem for his circumcision. There they encounter a man named Simeon and a woman named Anna. Simeon and Anna give witness that this child is like no other. Simeon and Anna then begin to tell others about who this child is and what he has come to bring. The light begins to shine a little bit brighter.

As we consider our own lives and whatever darkness we may be encountering or that we see in the lives of others or in the world, we can allow this story to interpret what we see.

God's greatest gift does not come with great fanfare but with simplicity. The light of the birth of Christ shines a little bit brighter each day. In our own lives the light of Christ shines a little bit brighter each day.

So, the question for us is if we want to be the ones who are the light bearers. If God through Christ is revealing light slowly and increasingly then God is searching for those individuals who are willing to be the light bearers. And that is the challenge and opportunity for each of us.

As we see the darkness in our families and in the world, we are invited to bring light. We are invited to be the ones to share the kind word. We are invited to be the ones to express the kind action. We are invited to be the ones to correct the injustice directed towards others or towards God's creation.

We are in the period of time when the light of each day is just a little bit brighter than the previous day.

We are invited to be the followers of Christ who share light that is a little bit brighter each day as well.

Merry Christmas and God Bless Us all to be the bearers of the light of Christ into the midst of whatever darkness may be present near us. AMEN.

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-Given: December 24, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)